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REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE SITUATION IN TAJIKISTAN

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1128 (1997) of 12 September 1997 and brings up to date the record of developments in Tajikistan and activities of the United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (UNMOT) since my report of 4 September 1997 (S/1997/686).

II. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GENERAL PEACE AGREEMENT

2. Since my last report, there has been progress in the implementation of the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord in Tajikistan (A/52/219-S/1997/510, annex I). Mr. Abdullo Nuri, Leader of the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) and Chairman of the Commission on National Reconciliation (CNR), arrived at Dushanbe on 11 September 1997. On 15 September, the CNR convened its first session in Dushanbe. Its first step was to establish four subcommissions, on political, legal, military and refugee issues respectively. The Joint Commission set up in accordance with the 1994 ceasefire agreement (S/1994/1102, annex I) has become a working group under the military subcommission; the Joint Commission on Refugees has become a working group under the subcommission on refugees. In addition, the CNR established a working group on the implementation of the Amnesty Law. Like the CNR, its subcommissions and expert working groups are composed of equal numbers of government and opposition representatives.

3. On 25 September, the CNR adopted its programme of work and a timetable for the implementation of the General Agreement. The timetable, which essentially covers the first three months, was quite ambitious and it is apparent that it will have to be extended. However, progress has been made in several areas. At the same time, government and UTO leaders have continued their efforts to strengthen support for the peace agreement in the country. Noteworthy is the visit on 31 October and 1 November by a joint high-level delegation to Tavildara and the Karategin Valley, which is under the control of the UTO. The delegation, which was led by the Prime Minister, Mr. Yakhyo Azimov, CNR Chairman Nuri and its Deputy-Chairman, Mr. Abdumadjid Dostiev, held talks with opposition

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commanders and surveyed the economic situation. As a result, the Government pledged additional support for the rehabilitation of those regions.

4. UNMOT supported the work of the CNR and my Special Representative, Mr. Gerd Merrem, maintained a continuous dialogue with President Emomali S. Rakhmonov and Mr. Nuri and continued to coordinate the Contact Group, which is composed of the guarantor States and organizations. UNMOT and other United Nations agencies provided technical and financial assistance to the start-up of CNR work, with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) contributing equipment, furniture and supplies. UNMOT cooperated closely with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Tajikistan in areas related to the observance of human rights and democratization.

5. The UNMOT military component maintained close working relations with the peacekeeping forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The mandate of those forces has been extended until the end of 1997, giving them additional authority to support the implementation of the inter-Tajik agreements in coordination with all concerned. It is worth noting that their tasks also include helping to ensure the security of the personnel of UNMOT, OSCE and other international organizations.

6. In my previous report, I referred to the request by President Rakhmonov and Mr. Nuri for United Nations assistance in organizing a meeting of potential donors. The donor conference on international peace and reconciliation in Tajikistan is now scheduled to be held at Vienna on 24 and 25 November. Its focus will be on activities directly related to the implementation of the inter-Tajik agreements, namely, political reconciliation and democratization; demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants and reform of power structures; repatriation and reintegration of refugees and internally displaced persons; and rehabilitation and development for the communities most affected. An aggregate amount of some $65 million is being sought. I am grateful to the Government of Austria for its kind offer of support and hospitality.

Political issues

7. Work in this area has concentrated on the allocation of 30 per cent of senior government positions to members of the UTO. As expected, this has proved to be a complex and difficult task, which requires a delicate balancing of diverse interests between the parties as well as within each camp. Intensive discussions on the issue have continued.

8. The political subcommission is entrusted with ensuring the release of prisoners of war in accordance with the Act on Mutual Forgiveness. Two groups of prisoners of war, 119 in total, were released by the UTO on 17 September and 19 October in Tavildara with assistance provided by UNMOT and the CIS peacekeeping forces. This number is significantly higher than previous releases by the UTO.

Legal issues

9. Work in the legal subcommission focused on the release of prisoners in implementation of the Amnesty Law and on preparation of amendments and additions to the Constitution. As regards implementation of the Amnesty Law, over 700 individual cases have been submitted for review to date. More than 500 have already been processed and recommendations for amnesty transmitted to government authorities. As a result, the Government agreed to the release of 161 detainees, of whom 78 were set free on 20 October (58 UTO supporters and 20 others) with UNMOT assistance.

10. The subcommission on legal issues organized a round-table discussion on 8 October on the question of amendments and additions to the Constitution, with the participation of government officials, legal experts, representatives of UNMOT, OSCE and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

Military issues

11. The process of registration of UTO fighters inside Tajikistan has started. More than 1,000 fighters have been registered in Tavildara and Garm. UNMOT monitored the process through its teams stationed in Kalai-Khumb and Garm. Initial restrictions imposed by local UTO commanders on the military observers were lifted after vigorous protest by UNMOT.

12. Concerning the repatriation of UTO fighters from Afghanistan, in late September the UTO requested that priority be given to the return of approximately 260 of its fighters in north-east Afghanistan. The UTO proposed that they be allowed to enter Tajikistan at Kalai-Khumb on the grounds that the shifting situation in Afghanistan made it too difficult and dangerous for them to go to the agreed entry points at Ishkashim and Nizhniy Panj. After some debate, this was agreed in principle and members of the military subcommission and UNMOT were to register the fighters and their arms. However, for various reasons, including insufficient assurances concerning security, this has not yet taken place.

13. On 26 September, the CNR plenary meeting issued an appeal to armed formations whose loyalty was not clear. It urged them to declare their allegiance either to the Government or to the opposition by 16 November, after which date they would be considered illegal and subject to forcible disarmament.

Refugee issues

14. The subcommission on refugees devoted much of its time to the repatriation of Tajik refugees from northern Afghanistan. The organized repatriation from camps in the Qonduz area was completed by 18 October, despite repeated flare-ups of fierce fighting in the region. Some 6,700 persons have returned to Tajikistan since the beginning of the operation in July. On 26 September, the CNR issued an appeal to all citizens of Tajikistan, local government authorities and heads of public and private enterprises to assist the returning refugees to the greatest extent possible. The returnees have been well received.

15. Of particular concern was the situation of some 6,000 refugees caught in the fighting between Afghan factions in and around the Sakhi Camp near Mazar-e-Sharif in late September/early October. At least 2 refugees were killed and as many as 40 wounded in the fighting. Repeated calls for a ceasefire to allow safe repatriation of refugees were to no avail. After the fighting subsided, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), with the assistance of Uzbek and Tajik authorities, was able to commence the refugees' repatriation to Tajikistan via Uzbekistan on 24 October, a process that is expected to be completed by December. This would complete the repatriation of Tajik refugees from Afghanistan.

III. SECURITY

16. While large parts of Tajikistan were relatively calm, the centre of the country, including Dushanbe and environs, was marked by a high level of violence. Among the more significant events were 16 bomb explosions recorded by UNMOT; a number of killings; and nightly sporadic firing in Dushanbe. UNMOT is aware of a total of 20 hostages currently being held by different armed groups.

17. At the beginning of September, the Presidential Guard launched an operation against the armed group under the command of Rizvon Sodirov in the Kofarnikhon and Leninskiy areas. The operation was suspended on 19 October on the grounds that it entailed too great a risk of confrontation with UTO personnel in those areas. On 26 September, an exchange of fire between the Presidential Guard and Ministry of the Interior Special Forces resulted in three fatalities and several wounded. On 16 October, a barracks of the Presidential Guard was attacked by a large group, killing 14 and wounding 18; 3 of the attackers were also killed. The authorities have attributed the attack to followers of Col. Mahmud Khudoiberdiev, the former commander of the Rapid Reaction Brigade.

18. During the latter half of October, there were armed clashes between armed groups and Government forces in the area of Tursunzade/Shakhrinau near the border with Uzbekistan. Government officials suspect that supporters of Col. Khudoiberdiev were responsible for the attacks. During the period under review, the Governments of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan were in close touch to control the situation.

19. The ceasefire between the Government and the UTO was maintained effectively, with the exception of one brief exchange of fire on 23 October near Dushanbe, which was quickly contained.

Joint security unit

20. In view of the continuing high level of violence, the safety of United Nations personnel in Tajikistan remains an important concern, especially if their tasks are expanded. As I already informed the Security Council on 17 October (S/1997/808), President Rakhmonov and Mr. Nuri have now agreed to the formation of a joint security unit with the task of providing security, including armed escorts, for United Nations personnel and transports mainly in the area from Dushanbe to Komsomolabad, which is considered to pose the greatest risk.

21. The Unit will consist of two infantry companies and will be formally established by presidential decree. It should begin functioning by the end of this month. UNMOT will effect its liaison with the Unit through military observers assigned to the Unit on a permanent basis. It has prepared rules of engagement, standard operating procedures and a training programme. It will also be necessary for UNMOT to support the Unit with communications equipment, rations and fuel. The aim is to shape an effective and disciplined Unit that would set an example for others in the process of reintegration and modernization.

IV. ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

22. At present, UNMOT comprises 44 military observers from Austria (5), Bangladesh (7), Bulgaria (6), Denmark (4), Jordan (5), Poland (3), Switzerland (5), Ukraine (3), and Uruguay (6), and 67 civilian personnel, of whom 27 are internationally recruited. In addition to its headquarters in Dushanbe, UNMOT maintained team sites in Khujand, Khorog, Kalai-Khumb, Garm and Kurgan-Tybe. Mr. Merrem continued as my Special Representative and Head of Mission. Brig.-Gen. Boleslaw Izydorczyk (Poland) continued as Chief Military Observer.

Financial aspects

23. The General Assembly, in its resolution 51/237 of 13 June 1997, appropriated $8,275,700 gross for the maintenance of UNMOT, based on an average strength of 45 military observers and its existing responsibilities. In the addendum to my previous report to the Security Council dated 11 September 1997 (S/1997/686/Add.1), I indicated that the cost for expanding UNMOT by 75 military observers, supported by 48 international and 87 locally recruited civilian staff was estimated at approximately $14.8 million for an initial six-month period. That estimate has now been revised to include the support to the Joint Security Unit and to provide for 75 military observers, 2 civilian police, 46 international staff and 100 locally recruited staff at a reduced cost of $13.7 million. A breakdown of the revised estimated financial requirements is provided for information purposes, by main categories of expenditure, in the annex to the present report. As at 31 October 1997, unpaid assessed contributions to the Special Account for UNMOT since the inception of the Mission through 15 November 1997 amounted to $2,283,915, which represents some 10 per cent of the assessment for the Mission. The unpaid assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations amounted to $1.6 billion.

V. HUMANITARIAN AND REHABILITATION ACTIVITIES

24. During the past two months, the efforts of humanitarian organizations centred on the preparation of winter relief programmes, such as distribution of food, coal and shoes, as well as assisting returnees from northern Afghanistan, now numbering 6,700 people. Humanitarian organizations concentrated their efforts in Khatlon province, where the majority of refugees are returning, while movement east of Dushanbe continued to be difficult. The rehabilitation, reconstruction and development programme financed by UNDP and executed by the

United Nations Office for Project Services re-established its presence in the Karategin Valley and now extends its activities throughout that region. United Nations agencies have updated the donor alert for urgent humanitarian needs in Tajikistan, extending the period until the end of December 1997 and listing shortfalls mainly in the water and sanitation, education and health sectors.

VI. OBSERVATIONS

25. The main development during the reporting period has been the convening of the CNR in Dushanbe and the progress achieved on a number of fronts: the exchange of prisoners of war and detainees, the registration of UTO fighters inside Tajikistan and the repatriation of refugees from Afghanistan. I am encouraged that the refugees have been received without hostility on their return, despite the additional burden they represent for a society impoverished by civil war and economic upheaval.

26. Both the Government and the UTO made serious efforts to carry out their commitments under the General Agreement and their representatives in the CNR cooperated in a businesslike manner. Not surprisingly, the pace at which the implementation of the peace agreement progressed lagged behind the very ambitious timetable envisaged in the agreement itself or the one later adopted by the CNR. Nevertheless, it should still be possible to complete the process in the course of 1998.

27. The ceasefire between the Government and the UTO was firmly maintained, although the level of violence continued to be high in the central part of the country. For the foreseeable future, therefore, the safety of United Nations personnel will remain an important concern. The formation of a joint Government/UTO protection unit addresses that concern in a practical way. The decision of CIS to authorize its peacekeeping force in Tajikistan to provide security to the United Nations on request provides a most welcome additional reassurance. I need not emphasize that I shall follow developments closely and take action as necessary to ensure the safety of the United Nations personnel working in Tajikistan.

28. In implementing the peace agreement, the support provided by the international community is crucial. In that respect, the Contact Group of guarantor States and organizations can make a valuable political contribution. As for material support, I hope that the conference at Vienna on 24 and 25 November to which I have invited potential donors will help generate much-needed resources. It remains for UNMOT to be given the capacity it needs to make the substantive contribution expected of it. I therefore recommend that the Security Council expand the mandate of UNMOT, in accordance with the proposals I submitted in September (S/1997/686).

29. In concluding this report, I should like to pay tribute to Mr. Merrem, my Special Representative, for his outstanding contribution and leadership, to Brig.-Gen. Izydorczyk, the Chief Military Observer, and to the men and women serving with UNMOT for the exemplary manner in which they have performed their difficult and often dangerous duties. I also take this opportunity to acknowledge with appreciation the cooperation and support given my Special Representative by the personnel of the United Nations agencies and programmes operating in Tajikistan.

Annex

Revised cost estimates for an initial six-month period

(Thousands of United States dollars)

	Category	Cost estimate
1.	Military personnel costs	1 074
2.	Civilian personnel costs	2 784
3.	Premises/accommodation	175
4.	Infrastructure repairs	-
5.	Transport operations	2 537
6.	Air operations	2 142
7.	Naval operations	-
8.	Communications	867
9.	Other equipment	710
10.	Supplies and services	165
11.	Election-related supplies and services	-
12.	Public information programmes	89
13.	Training programmes	-
14.	Mine-clearing programmes	-
15.	Disarmament and demobilization programme/support of assembly areas and support for the Joint Security Unit	2 751
16.	Air and surface freight	2
17.	Staff assessment	404
	Total	13 700

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